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THE SPIRIT OF ART.

BETWEEN the Art which we call ancient and that which we call modern, there is a line of demarcation, the exact nature of which it is well worth while to determine. The difference between the schools of the middle ages, and those of this age, is so great, and, at the same time, so universally manifested through all the variations in the Art of each time, that it could neither be the result of circumstances, nor of national character, but of essentially differing spirits animating each era. From Naples to Flanders the mediæval Art is earnest, deep-toned, and dignified, while from our west to the furthest civilized east, the Art of this day is, as a whole, superficial and foolish. It was not the Catholic religion which caused the difference, for the Catholic artists of this day are no better than the Protestant—it was not a better knowledge of the principles of Art, for all intellectual and moral science is better understood now than then. Nor was it in better instruction that those elder men had an advantage over us: Giotto was not as good a draughtsman as Ingres, and there are scores of young artists in the French life schools, who can draw a figure more accurately than could the restorer of painting, or any of his immediate successors.

Not to prolong a blind examination of things not all to the point, we will go at once to that which seems to us the true cause of the difference. The middle age artist worked in a spirit of reverence and profound humility. He believed in something over and above him, for which he labored. It might have been religion—it might have been superstition, which was the life of his effort—it does not matter—it was not the thought of himself. Believing in something higher and more worthy than he was, he did not place himself on the summit of the pyramid which he built. He regarded himself but as the instrument of his Art, and taking his measure by a loftier standard, he was led continually to look upward, and thus derived a dignity from the consciousness of being connected with that above him, whatever it might have been. This dignity became a characteristic of all that he did. Walking reverently among men and before Nature, he believed himself an appointed servant of a sovereign who deserved his most earnest effort, and this faith in himself begot in others faith in him, and men accepted him as a revelator, reverencing and honoring him for his work's sake.

But our modern artist is, with few ex-

ceptions, the acme of his own creation—he recognizes nothing above him, and reverences nothing more than himself. Now, we believe it to be a truth, that a man never overestimates himself, though he may, in comparison, underrate everything, and everybody, else. Being, therefore, the standard by which he measures everything, how can it be possible that Nature should have any dignity to him, much less, how can he derive dignity from her service. So he brings her to him, and selects, rejects, and amends, as though he were the *model* to which all things must conform. That which he likes, is good—that which he likes not, is bad. Without elevating himself even in his own estimation, he degrades all things around him, and works in a spirit of arrogance and insolence, therefore a foolish spirit.

This is the essential difference between the two. The former being reverential looks upward, and so becomes spiritual and exalted by the things he regards; while the latter, looking down on all things, becomes material and degraded; each one assuming the character of the things he contemplates. The qualities which we admire in the early painters become evident then as not belonging to themselves by nature, but as derived from the habit they were in of regarding the subjects of their Art, being a tone shed over their works by an inner light; while we are material, not because the spiritual world of Art is further from us than from them, but because we contemplate only material subjects of artistic study. Subject, indeed, has become something of almost entire indifference, and the qualities with which the artist himself induces the work, are the points of admiration and criticism. It may be a marketing—it may be the Alps—the 'breadth,' the 'handling,' the 'tone,'—the 'method' in short, being the same in all cases, and constituting the value of the work.

The artist, then, is no longer the servant of his Art, but it, rather, the minister to his importance, and having its apex in him. How, then, can it elevate him, or give him faith in himself and his mission; and not having faith in himself, how shall the world have faith in him? Is it any wonder, then, that we have in these days no festivals like those which greeted the production of works of Art in the days of Cimabue, whose Madonna was received with such a procession and such manifestations of joy, as we greet a conqueror or a favorite statesman with? The spirit in which Cimabue worked, and in which his

works were received, was the essential spirit of Christianity, whether he himself was a Christian or not. It was reverence and forgetfulness of self, and the ascription of all the glory and honor of Art to Nature and God. The spirit in which we work is that of self-exaltation and self-glorification, a spirit not only not that of Christianity, but not even so dignified as that of Paganism, which supposes something better than ourselves to worship; lower than Fetichism, which supposes a power to be conciliated—it is Self-worship, materialism in its grossest form—and, if this be the spirit of modern Art, what kind of worth or vitality shall we attribute to its works—and is it any wonder that the devotees of a creed so degraded should find few so poor as to do them reverence?

ART-EXPRESSION.

OCCASIONALLY one may find in a *café* of Rome or Florence, pencil-marks upon the small marble tables which are worth studying. Bold, free, sketching lines—landscape, historic, ideal, fragmentary—bits of everything, yet drawn with a power seldom found in the completed pictures of the artists who have traced these upon the coffee-stained stone. Not unfrequently may be heard, too, a "sketching" sentence uttered while "in the liberty," to use an expressive phrase of our Methodist brethren, by one whose planned sentences are anything but great; I have heard words struck out, when two minds of equal strength, but of unequal quality, came in contact, that were as rough and burning with gold, as any fragments of quartz smitten from the jagged ledge by Californian's hammer. Truths are set free which were never "thought out" by the speaker; felt by him, in their full profundity—but which he would be the last one to realize, should he attempt the task of their analyzation. I like that thing in Art. That simple, yet mysterious process of revelation—that unconscious grasp of those principles which still elude the touch of science, and, child-like, play with powers that terrify the intellectual world. The faculty seems a foretaste of that other state—and there never has been, there is not, nor can there ever be, any Art without it. All that a picture has, which is not of this power, is not Art, and should be discharged from the canvas forthwith—that is, in our estimation of the work, as an Art-work.

Yet there may be many points in a painting which are of this faculty, and bear evidence to the truthfulness of the artist, which are not in themselves artistic, but simple and priceless blunders, betraying that the record was made under circumstances of rare exaltation, or during the painful enthusiasm resulting from too great an influx of beauty from God's Nature, or of life from His breath. Thus, it is said, that Michael Angelo's Moses has an absurd anatomical error in the insertion of one of